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B.K. BORISON, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *FIRST-TIME CALLER*

# *breathe with me*

**BECKA MACK**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *CONSIDER ME*



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# *Breathe with Me*

BECKA MACK



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*For those who so badly want to be parents,  
who are exhausted and heartbroken,  
and so damn tired of asking why.  
I see you.*

*And for me.  
For all my tears, my heartache,  
for the years spent wondering why, wondering when.  
For the body I hated, and the mind that was destroyed in the process.  
For the strength I found when I didn't think I could possibly dig any deeper,  
and when I didn't think I should have to.  
I'm sorry I wasn't kinder to you.  
I'm sorry I didn't love you the way you needed to be loved at that time.  
I'm sorry I didn't see your worth.*

*Nobody's worth is tied to their body's ability to reproduce.*

## *A note from the author*

*Breathe with Me* contains discussions surrounding foster care and adoption, as well as heavy themes of infertility and its impact on mental health and relationships. If you are sensitive to these subjects, please use this information to make an informed decision about whether to proceed with this story.

# I DON'T GET ON MY KNEES FOR NO—WHOOOPS, I'M ON MY KNEES

*Cara*

## ***Three and a half years ago: The night we met***

“FUCK MY MOUTH AND TELL me to swallow, this is way too much food.”

I press a hand to my forehead, panic crawling up my throat as I watch the caterer lug in box after box of hot food.

One thing about Cara Nicole Hunter? I'm extremely persuasive.

I know what you're thinking: Cara, babe, we *knew* this.

I guess the real question is, *How* am I so persuasive?

Honest answer? It's a God-given talent.

What does that mean for me? It means I get a lot of things in life, mainly *my way*. Really, how much more could I ask for? The three-legged stray cat who showed up at our door one rainy evening when I was eight? Slept on my pillow for six years after I let the first tear slip free when my dad said no because Grandpa was allergic. (He was never going to live forever anyway.) The field trip my *history* class took to the aquarium on my sixteenth birthday? As I so kindly informed my teacher, no sixteen-year-old should have to spend such a monumental, *historic* day stuck in a classroom. And that seven-year-old, two-door convertible I *had* to have at twenty, but was five thousand dollars over budget? Drove off in it with a thousand extra bucks in my pocket after nothing more than the bat of my lashes, the bite of my lower lip, and a whispered *please*.

Things consistently go my way, and yet when the last box of food is placed on the counter of the too-small kitchen in the quaint rec hall, I'm reminded that four months ago, when I met with Debbie, event coordinator for the Vancouver Vipers—or *was it Vixens?*—it was *not* my way or the highway. I insisted Debbie only needed half of what she wanted, and she insisted she needed all of it. I stood my ground, but she stood hers harder, grinning like she knew something I didn't. There was nothing I could do but watch in slack-jawed silence as she left, every thought in my big, beautiful brain reduced to a single *what the fuck*. My entire world had been shaken beyond belief, and I simply didn't know how to go on existing. That's the excuse I gave my best friend, Olivia, when I politely requested a temple rub, tacos, and a pitcher of margaritas later that night.

Nevertheless, I persevered, because another thing about Cara Nicole Hunter? I always rise above. But if I lose the Vancouver Vixens or whatever-the-fuck because I've let them blow 75 percent of their budget on food that surely will not all be consumed tonight, I may perish. I've been busting my gorgeous, round ass since I graduated from the University of Vancouver two years ago, and I'm finally *really* getting Fête & Flair off the ground.

Don't get me wrong: coordinating exquisite weddings has been enjoyable. And that extravagant bat mitzvah this past summer? They tipped me so much I managed to drag Olivia to Nashville for five days, where I proceeded to live out my *ride a cowboy* dream. But I'm ready to take on more. Surely I can't be the only event planner who dreams of throwing unforgettable events that have people waking up naked next to their archnemesis, not a clue in the world what happened other than that 1) the sex was hands down the best they've ever had, and 2) the party was out of this world.

Bonus points if the party raises a fuckload of money for charity too.

This organization is hosting their first-ever fundraiser for The Family Project, a charity supporting a local children's home, and I cannot fuck it up.

"I will not allow it," I mutter as the food is carried through the hall to the tables at the back of the large room. Debbie, the Vixens' coordinator, unfortunately insisted on a buffet.

"What?" Shazia joins me, sipping her extra-large latte. Apparently, my second-in-command needs caffeine to deal with me. Rude, I know. "You've been muttering to yourself for, like, ten minutes, and you look like you're gonna vomit." She adjusts her

blouse before running the tip of her finger along her jaw, over the hem of her deep purple hijab. “Don’t do it around me. Can’t have you ruining my outfit. These guys...” She kisses her fingertips. “Chef’s kiss.”

“What guys?”

Her brows rise. “The team?”

“The Vixens?”

She rolls her eyes. “The *Vipers*, Cara. I looked them all up last night, and I’m just saying, I’d have been a hockey fan years ago if I knew the players looked like *this*. Number eighty-seven’s really been around the block; it’s gotta be his dimples.”

“Could it be he has a charming personality?” I suggest with a teasing brow as I head toward the food tables.

Shazia makes a face. “Charming personality? No, he’s got that look. You know, the one you always say deserves to be slapped off a face.”

“Ah. The fuckboy look. I know it well.” Peeking beneath the lids of the warming pans, I inhale the smells and sigh. Debbie chooses this moment to walk in, her arm looped through her husband’s, and I point at her. “I am not to blame when all this food isn’t eaten.” I throw my arms in the air. “And it’s New Year’s Day, Debbie. What if your guests are starting the new year committed to some cultlike diet, and they don’t want to eat *any* of this?”

She smirks, working the buttons of her coat as she murmurs something about being so sure we don’t have to worry about that, and I gasp when I get a look at the dazzling red number she’s sheathed in.

“Debbie! Look at you!” I pull the coat from her hands, fluffing her loose silver curls when she removes her knitted toque. “Albert.” I nudge her husband, his wide eyes flitting between me and his wife, because he saw me storming through here earlier today while I was setting up, and I guess I, like, scared him or whatever. “Have you seen your wife?”

“Have I... She’s-she’s...” He takes a breath, smooths a hand over his tie, and winks at Debbie. “Gorgeous. As always.”

“You trying to get it tonight?” I tilt my head toward Debbie and wink. “Debbie’s always DTF.”

“What’s DTF?”



“Down to fuck. Right, Deb? Get a couple drinks in you and you’ll be dancing on the table tonight.”

Debbie snorts, swatting me. “This is a fundraiser for children in the foster system, Ms. Hunter.”

“Exactly.” I hit her with a pointed look. “Remember that when you’re six drinks deep and trying to drag Albert into the coat closet.”

Another laugh, but it fades as she twirls, her eyes twinkling as she takes in the space, a shimmering winter wonderland without the damp chill of January on the West Coast. “It’s stunning, Cara. You’ve done an incredible job, but I had no doubt you would.” *Small women-owned businesses turn me on*, she’d said four months ago when I’d asked her if she was really taking a chance on my little event-planning business. She’d followed it up by asking me if I’d like to get a drink with her, and four hours later I met Albert when he had to collect her from the bar because I’d convinced her to do Jäger bombs.

I’ve mentioned I’m persuasive, right?

“Your continued faith in me is much appreciated.” My eyes slide to the food table, and I can feel my expression twist with agony.

“It’s not too much food,” she insists, the words drenched in amusement.

“You’re right.” I sniff, throwing my shoulders back. “Because I’m gonna stay behind tonight and shove every last bit of it in my mouth if I have to, and when I’m sick tomorrow, you’ll have to come over and tend to me.” Another snuffle. “I like toasted marshmallow lattes with a heart in the foam because it makes me feel special, and if you feel like braiding my hair and feeding me compliments, that would be nice too.”

An eye roll, and Debbie mutters something about me being nearly as theatrical as somebody named Carter Beckett. Do I immediately like him because we’re alike, or do I hate him because nobody outshines Cara Nicole Hunter? Only time will tell.

As people begin to filter in, I disappear into the back, but not before drinking in the look of wonder on their faces as they take in the décor. It never fails to remind me that I’ve chosen the right path, chased the right dreams, put in the damn work to get where I am. I said that things come easy to me, but never has that meant that I’m not busting my ass along the way for the life I want to live.

I spend the next hour preparing the live auction, and when it’s ready to go twenty minutes early, I finally give myself a minute to breathe. Inside my purse, I find a package

each of Skittles and M&M's and tear them open, dumping some into my palm. I swallow the handful with a gleeful hum, returning Shazia's look of disgust with a wink while washing the snack down with a glass of red wine.

"I know." I sigh, swirling the wine in my glass as I read the label on the bottle. "A 2008 merlot? Meant to be savored, not chugged. I'm a menace."

"It's the mixed Skittles and M&M's that makes you a monster, Cara. Don't even play."

Holding her stare, I shove another handful in, licking my lips when I swallow. "I don't play games, Shazia."

Sighing, she pours herself a glass of water and fans her flushed face as she drinks it. "You should play games with one of the guys out there. They're hot as fuckballs."

I count it a personal achievement every time Shazia says *fuckballs*. "How hot can a pickleball player be?"

"Hockey player," Shazia corrects.

Listen, I don't sport. Everyone knows I don't sport. Sure, every ten-ish days Olivia drags me to a hot yoga class, but I spend most of it whining that my body isn't supposed to bend like that unless I'm being railed, followed by starfishing on the mat. Then I convince Olivia to stop for burgers and milkshakes on the way home—because, balance—and I worm my way into a cuddle session on the couch after making her admit she loves me.

Anyway, *hockey*. I Googled *most famous hockey player* and a picture of this old guy called Wayne Gretzky popped up. I stopped my search there. Listen, I'm not opposed to older men, but poor Wayne looked like he stopped being able to handle me at least ten years ago. In his younger days, though? Sign me up, mullet and all. I guess Olivia didn't appreciate that—she *loves* hockey—because she followed a long moment of stunned silence with a quiet, terrifying threat to disown me. Joke's on her; she tethered her whole-ass soul to mine six years ago, the day our eyes met across our tiny dorm room and we shared two shots of tequila. She'll never get rid of me now.

"I like Debbie. If this goes well, she'll hire me for future events. I can't be fucking the players."

Shazia's sigh is all parts drama as she peers up at me from beneath thick, dark lashes. "A true friend would let me live vicariously through them."

“Listen.” I set my wine down and peek out the door to gauge how ready they are for the auction. “I don’t get on my knees for no—”

Oh.

Oh, Jesus.

Jesus fucking fuckballs.

“That’s... that’s not...” My mouth runs dry as I gesture haphazardly at the gigantic group of men gathered at the back of the room, shoving food down their throats. “Wayne Gretzky.”

Shazia snorts. “Wayne Gretzky? He retired, like, twenty years ago. How old did you think the players were, Care?”

“I thought... I thought...” My grip loosens, on both my sanity and my candy, the latter spilling from my hands, skittering across the floor. The heads of every single man huddled at the food table snap up, eyes searching, as if they recognize the sound of food hitting the floor.

Sweet mother of fuck, they’re pretty. Pretty and broad and tall. *Tall*, tall men, which is always nice as a five-foot-ten queen.

“Candy,” one of them mutters, distressed green eyes bouncing between my spilled snacks, my face, and his friends. He gestures toward my feet with his plate of food, appearing to short-circuit as he claps at his friend’s shoulder. “She’s not gonna... she’s not gonna waste it, is she? Ten-second rule! *Ten-second rule!*”

His friend sighs. “It’s a five-second rule, Carter, not ten.” His gaze tracks the scattered candy, slowing like it’s been dipped in molasses when it stops on my pointy heels. Blue eyes drag up the length of my legs, and his throat works as those eyes bounce from hip to hip in my skintight red dress. Up farther, and every inch of me sizzles under his insatiable stare. God, I can *feel it*, like a hand skating roughly up my side, gripping my waist, then my throat.

And then those eyes come to mine. Warm and bright, sunshine and summer heating me from the tips of my toes all the way up to where it gathers in my chest and crawls into my cheeks. Impossibly wide and full of awe, like he’s just discovered there’s an eighth wonder of the world, and she’s standing right in front of him.

Those eyes stop me in my tracks. They steal the words from my throat, my own name from my memory. I don’t know what it is; truly, I don’t. Maybe it’s the way every ounce

of exhaustion vanishes like clouds after a storm, revealing the bluest, clearest skies. Maybe it's the way they demand every inch of my attention, daring me to look away. I can't. I can't look away, and I don't know why. For the first time in my life, I stand still and forget everything.

*"Cara!"* Hands grip my shoulders, pulling me into a warm embrace. Debbie grins at me, I think. "Did you see? They're eating all that food! I told you! You owe me tequila shots." She follows my gaze over her shoulder and hums. "Ah. I see you've caught the eye of our favorite left-winger."

I don't see what politics has to do with this, but her words are enough to shake me from my trance, pulling my eyes from his so I can take in the rest of him, and holy fuckballs, look at the size of those hands. Those bad boys could wreck a pussy. I run a finger along the dainty gold chain sitting at the base of my throat, and heat sparks between my legs as I imagine one of those hands closing around my throat, squeezing as he holds me in place, pounds into me.

The man at his side gives up on my spilled candy, heaving a dramatic sigh, and... stomping a foot. Hm. This might be that theatrical "Carter Bucket" Debbie was telling me about earlier. "It's been way longer than ten seconds," he whines. "Now no one gets the candy."

My current obsession doesn't let his stare move from mine when he murmurs, again, "Five-second rule, Carter, not ten."

Carter Bucket's frown hooks into a smirk as he looks from his friend to me, an understanding seeming to dawn. With all the swagger of a man who thinks his shit doesn't stink, he saunters over to me.

It pains me to admit, but he's gorgeous. The type of man who makes you think there really might be a God. Tall and broad, a jawline carved from marble, knee-wobbling dimples, with a messy mop of chestnut waves and stunning emerald eyes.

"Hey," he whispers. "I'm—"

"No."

His jaw drops, and his teammates—and Debbie—snicker. "What? But I—"

"I can tell that word's hard for you to comprehend, isn't it? See, I said no, but I worry that what you heard was 'please keep talking to me.'" My smile is every ounce as

patronizing as it is soft as I touch two fingers to Carter's chin, gently closing his mouth. "For clarity, *fuck no*, fuckboy."

"Oh my God," one of the men mutters, hands buried in his golden waves. "It's happening."

"I've never seen anything like it," whispers another, dark curls falling over bright blue eyes as his head whips back and forth, watching us. "I'm... mystified."

"Speechless." An absent-minded murmur from the one responsible for the current frantic state of my heartbeat—both the one in my chest and the one at the cleft of my thighs. The way he lets his gaze roam every inch of my body like it's his right, it lights me on fire from the inside out. And that smirk? That smirk tells me I should get used to it.

But I never fall to my knees that easily.

"Take a picture," I drawl, tossing my blond hair over my shoulder. As I bend to pick up my scattered candy, I glance back, fluttering my eyelashes, watching as his grin grows and his eyes drop to my ass. "It'll last longer."

"Wait," he calls as I head toward the back. "You forgot something."

I check my glossy red nails. "Can't be all that important if I've managed to forget it."

He chuckles softly, the shake of his head so subtle I nearly miss it. "Ah, but that's where you're wrong."

I open my mouth to tell him I'm never, ever wrong, and that he should jot that down, but he holds up his hand, stopping me.

"I know, I know. You're never wrong, and it's absurd of me to even suggest it. But humor me, just this once?"

I roll my tongue in my mouth to stop myself from grinning. "Proceed."

"You see, you forgot to get my name." There go his eyes, roaming the length of me again, like he's committing it to memory. He lays a hand over his heart like the saint he is. "And it would be heartless of me to let you walk away without it."

"Mmm. A considerate man, are we?"

"Yup." He slips large hands in his pockets, and *Jesus*, I don't think the man has stopped smiling. He tips his head. "Emmett Brodie, at your service, my queen."

Oh my *God*, fucking *finally*, a well-deserved nickname. I want to bask in it like sunshine, roll around in all that glory, but Emmett Brodie doesn't appear to be done.



“Now, since you never, ever forget important things...” He roots around in his back pocket, producing a phone. “You were about to give me your number.”

I cross my arms over my chest to hide that my nipples have risen to attention. “My, you’re eager. Aren’t you going to ask my name first?”

“Nah. Already know it.”

With a perfect, wide grin, Emmett Brodie deposits his phone into my hand. It’s opened to the New Contact page, except the name field has already been filled out.

*Mrs. Brodie.*

For the first time in my life, my heartbeat trips.

A shadow falls over me, and the air is sucked from my lungs as perfect, lush lips dip to my ear, warm breath dancing down my neck.

“C’mon, Mrs. Brodie. The quicker we get through the formalities, the quicker we get to the fun stuff, like my ring on your finger and you in my bed for the rest of our lives.”

---

I, CARA NICOLE HUNTER, have failed.

I’m no longer a confident queen.

I’m an erratic queen, hiding out in the back room, where I’ve been since I sashayed away from Emmett Brodie without a word after leaving him with my phone number.

I managed to do that with all the confidence in the world, fluttering my lashes, swinging my hips. Then, as soon as I was behind the door, I broke into a panic sweat, drank another glass of wine, then another, and texted Olivia seventeen times in rapid succession.

Look, I love men. They’re hot, eager, and some of them know how to use their fingers, tongue, *and* their cocks—I call that the holy trinity. But Jesus Christ—and I say this with the utmost respect—at least 75 percent of the men I talk to have me thinking: *Really? You were the fastest sperm?*

I’ve learned that you can’t have it all when it comes to most men: the looks, the bedroom skill, and the personality. I’m always sacrificing one for another, and since I haven’t been looking for anything more serious than a dicking with the potential to land me on bedrest, it’s normally the personality I wind up forgoing.

But that man out there? He's not just six-foot-plus of golden locks, sky-blue eyes, and a panty-dropping grin highlighted by an impeccably carved jawline. He's also... witty. Confident. Slightly arrogant, and deservedly so. Clever too, and all of those things put together? A lethal combination that has me mentally rearranging my schedule for the next fifty years or so for a fucking *man*.

Have I lost my damn mind?

I swipe a hand through the air, waving away the thoughts running rampant in my head as Debbie comes stumbling into the room.

"Cara, I can't thank you enough. It was such a gorgeous night." She wraps her arms around me, and I sink into a hug that smells remarkably like tequila. "I can't believe how much money we raised. Did you hear Emmett donated fifty grand?"

I may or may not have heard that. I may or may not have also panic vomited when Shazia Googled his salary and shoved it in my face. Thank fuck for the emergency toiletry kit in my work bag. After I brushed my teeth, I used another glass of red as mouthwash.

I mean, nine million a year? Who the... What the... I fan my face for the fiftieth time tonight as a dizzying heat rushes to my head.

Debbie gives me a loopy grin, pumping her brows. "He's handsome, huh?"

"Is he? I hadn't noticed." I bury my face in a long pull of wine. At least I'm no longer gargling it. "Hypothetically speaking, what's your policy if, say, the Vipers were to contract Fête & Flair to do future events, and the owner of Fête & Flair were to begin—hypothetically, of course—sleeping with one of the players?"

Debbie taps her chin. "You know, come to think of it, I don't believe we have a policy in place for our outsourced contractors." She winks when her husband joins us, coats in hand. "You sure we can't stay and help you clean up? You're all alone here."

"Please, no. Go home and get railed, Deb. The cleaning crew is coming at one. I'll head home then."

Debbie squeezes my shoulder. "You're a real-life angel. I'll be in touch on Monday."

When the doors close behind them, I settle into the stillness. I always like this part. The contrast of the mess mixed with the silence. Reminds me of my head some days.

My phone pings, and I sigh at the message.

Preston (finance bro, mommy issues): Please, baby. What can I do for another chance?

Jesus, again? I have *got* to get rid of this guy.

Me: \$3000.

Preston (finance bro, mommy issues): Really???

Me: I'll consider it.

I won't, but there are at least twenty other texts just like this one, spanning the last month, and I simply don't know how else to make him *get it*. Surely asking for money will do the trick.

My phone pings again, and I snort-choke on my wine, covering my mouth when it goes sputtering.

Sudden heat touches my back, and my brain goes haywire when large hands come down on the counter on either side of me, caging me in.

"Three thousand dollars," Emmett Brodie whispers, chin tucked over my shoulder as he reads the brand-new bank transfer lighting my phone screen. "From?"

I breathe through the tightness in my chest, the warmth seeping through my body. "My ex. He wants to get back together."

"I see." His eyes come to mine. "Well, go on. Tell him you're taken."

I bite back my smile as I hold Emmett's stare, so smug and sure as I type out a message.

Me: I've thought about it. It's a no.

"Good girl. That certainly wasn't an *I'm taken*, though."

Twisting between his arms, I lean back against the counter. "Because I'm not."

"Aren't you?" He tilts his head, playfulness sparking in his blue gaze. "Hm. We'll have to fix that."

I lift my wine to my lips. "It's cute you have such lofty dreams."

Emmett wipes his amusement away with the pad of his thumb. "When can I take you on a date?"

"My schedule's full."

"Clear it."

"I don't know if I'm interested."

"You are."

"Am I?"

His gaze dips to my breasts, my nipples eager to meet him too. Those girls never lie. "Yup."

I catch a drop of wine rolling down my glass with the tip of my tongue. "Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? You sure? Why not right now?"

"We just met. I never do anything on day one. Virtue, and all that."

"Virtue is so important." He taps my phone, lighting up the screen, illuminating the fact that, at 11:58 p.m. and three thousand down, Preston still hasn't gotten the clue. "Okay then. Tomorrow."

He dips his head, and my body seizes. When his warm lips touch my cheekbone, I come back to life, gripping my wineglass like it's my final thread of sanity.

"This is my favorite birthday ever," he murmurs against my skin.

"What? It's your birthday?"

"Mhmm. For another two minutes, at least. New Year's baby, freshly twenty-seven. Feels a lot like the first day of my life, though."

"Happy birthday," I breathe, heart pounding at the feel of him pressed against me, his fingers dancing down my hair. "What did you get?"

His palm settles in the curve of my lower back, his whisper pressed to my ear. "You."

My heart thuds as I press my hand to it, willing myself not to call after him, ask him to stay. He doesn't give me the chance.

Before he disappears out the back door, he winks. "Good night, Mrs. Brodie."

I open my phone, ignoring the message from Preston asking if another two thousand will do the trick, and head to Olivia's contact. It's 11:59 p.m., and there's no way she's going to answer, but I call her anyway.

I'm just about to leave her a scathing voicemail about having the audacity to sleep through such a monumental moment when there's a knock at the back door. And when I

open it?

Emmett Brodie waits there, head down, gripping the doorframe.

There's not an ounce of remorse in those beautiful eyes when he peers up at me from beneath thick lashes.

Those eyes are nothing compared to the smile this man hits me with.

"Good morning, beautiful." The sweet words skate roughly down my sides as he steps inside, gently forcing me backward. "It's tomorrow."

My jaw dislodges, and he grins, gripping it as my back hits the counter.

"Ah," he whispers, thumb tracing my lower lip. "I was worried my cock wouldn't fit in there, but now I see. Perfect mouth, just like the rest of you. You'll have no trouble, will you?"

Fire ignites in my belly, and I fight the urge to squeeze my thighs together. "God, you're arrogant, aren't you?"

"Now, I know what you're thinking." He shifts me up onto the edge of the counter, hand slipping from my jaw down to the base of my throat where he grips me gently. "But one look is all it took to know you had to be mine. I don't deserve you now, but I'm gonna spend the rest of my life making up for that, and when I die, I'll be a worthy man." He tilts my head back, mouth hovering a breath from mine. "Tell me I can have you, gorgeous. Because it's you or no one."

"What happens if I say no?"

"Then I call it. Pack it in. Quit the team, quit hockey. Sell my house and move back home, live in my parents' basement for the rest of my unfulfilling life while I pine after the woman who got away." His face dips, just a touch, lips grazing mine in a way that sets my soul on fire. "But you're not going to say no, are you? You want to be worshipped. Crave it. *Deserve it*. And you want to let me do it."

The thin strap of my dress slips off my shoulder, and Emmett's eyes ping there. He keeps my throat in his grasp as his free hand coasts up my side, dotting every inch of me in goose bumps. Broad fingertips dance over my shoulder, catching that strap, but instead of setting it back in place, he grips it in his fist.

My chest heaves, heart hammering. "This dress is a masterpiece," I barely breathe.

"Nah." His lips ghost along my jaw, pausing at my ear. "It's you who's the masterpiece."



I sling one arm around his neck, gliding my hand up the back of his head, over the cropped hair, sinking my fingers into the thick waves up top. It takes every ounce of willpower to pull his mouth away from mine, and I smile at the hint of panic that creeps into his stare. Shifting my ass further back on the counter, the satin strap of my dress rips in Emmett's fist as I go. Shimmying the smooth red material up my legs, I wiggle out of my black thong, tuck it in his shirt pocket, prop my heels up, and spread my thighs. "Prove it, Mr. Brodie."

"Jesus fucking Christ." His lips part on a heavy, desperate breath, pupils blown as they zero in on where I want him. "I won't be gentle."

"Don't worry. I like it rough."

He drops to his knees without hesitation, grips my thighs, jerks my ass to the edge of the counter, buries his face where it belongs, and I die.

I die, right here in a kitchen that doesn't belong to me, bare ass on the counter, with a hockey player feasting on my pussy. I die over and over, a beautiful, star-filled death as Emmett Brodie thrusts his tongue inside me, flicks at my clit. As he sucks me into his mouth, mutters about knowing I'd taste like this, like his last meal on death row. As his fingers work their way inside me, plunging, curling, demanding. As his thumb finds my clit, and then my ass, making me gasp. As I tell him he's the first person to touch me there, and he promises he'll be the only. As he grins, watching me moan and arch my back, inviting his thumb deeper, pussy clenching around the two fingers he sinks inside me, his trimmed beard glistening and his eyes dancing when he calls me his filthy wife and promises to spend the rest of his life fucking me wherever and however I want.

I die, and I come, and I die, and I come. When I come again, both holes filled and his mouth suctioned over my clit, he finally grants me mercy. Pulls his fingers free, presses his tongue to my center, and licks me slowly, bottom to top.

And then he stands between my quivering legs, holds my stare as I gasp for air, his belt buckle clanking as he pulls it free.

"Tell me I can have you." His pants fall to the floor, and he forgoes the buttons on his shirt, instead pulling it over his head, and thank fucking God, because *wow*, what a fucking body. His lower lip slides between his teeth as he hooks his thumbs into the waistband of black boxer briefs, and my eyes bulge as his thick, massive cock springs free.

*W. O. W.*

*Wow.*

*Wow, wow, wow. Holy mother of fuck... I mean, it's just... just...*

Fingers grip my chin, guiding my gaze back to Emmett's amused one, and I waste no time giving him the words he wants.

"You can have me," I pant, fisting his hair, yanking him toward me. "You can have me."

Our mouths collide, and everything inside me skids to an abrupt halt. My world stops spinning at the taste of him, the sweetness of me on his tongue as it sweeps against mine, the delirious way he devours my mouth. I feel every ounce of this kiss, the way it seeps into my bloodstream, pulses through my veins as he grasps my waist, holds me tight to him.

We pull apart, panting, the hunger in his gaze cut by the shock tugging his brows together. Those eyes scour my face, watch me lift two trembling fingertips to my lips, feeling the way they buzz, desperate for more.

My chest heaves but I swear my heart isn't beating. It's stalled, seized and waiting for something to bring it back to life.

And then the crease in Emmett's forehead smooths, and the most breathtaking smile spreads across his gorgeous face. "I fucking knew it," is all he whispers before he wraps my legs around his waist. He dips his face, and when he breathes *mine* against my lips, my heart restarts.

*This kiss.*

This kiss is everything you ever dream of. It's shaking hands, biting nails, suffocating grips. It's hot breath, lashing tongues, hungry moans, and desperate whimpers. It's realizing that everyone before him has meant nothing, because this? This is what it feels like to be alive. To want something so bad all semblance of control leaves my body on a single breath. I want to give it up, all of it, the power I always squeeze tightly in my fist, and let him take it, wield it however he sees fit. I don't have to wonder if I trust him enough; I just... do.

I just do.

"You have the most beautiful cock I've ever seen in my life."

"You know what?" His shoulders shake with his exhale as I rub myself over his thick length. "When I had my face buried between your thighs, I was thinking to myself, *This is*